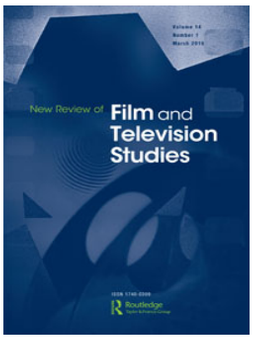

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Ran Ma

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A genealogy of film festivals in the People's Republic of China: 'film weeks' during the 'Seventeen Years' (1949–1966)

Ran Ma

Graduate School of Letters, Nagoya University, Nagoya, Japan

ABSTRACT

Exhibitions known as 'Film Weeks' (*dianyingzhou*) were systematically launched nationwide in the People's Republic of China by the state to showcase imported films during the Seventeen Years (1949–1966), which was a crucial period for the establishment of the socialist regime. This study identifies film weeks as a specific type of film festival, situates their analysis within the sociopolitical context of the Seventeen Years, and explores them as a dynamic process in which actors such as the Chinese film industry, film professionals, and audiences negotiated with the authority of the party-state, and a centralized cultural system. Central to the Chinese state's encompassing cultural exchange programs with nations both within and outside the socialist bloc, the practice of film weeks highlighted China's changing stance in cold war power politics. Meanwhile, film weeks promoted the practices of socialist cinéphilia in engaging Chinese audiences with foreign film cultures. Using case studies of the Soviet Film Week in the 1950s and the 1957 Asian Film Week, this article historicizes film weeks' connections with an increasingly globalizing film festival network while also examining how the vernacular practices of Chinese festivals can contribute to rethinking film festival studies' Eurocentric discursive framework.

KEYWORDS

Film week; film festival; Seventeen Years; cultural diplomacy; socialist cinéphilia

Introduction

As early as 1950, a film week of the People's Democratic Republic Nations was launched in Beijing. Its lineup consisted of works from eight communist countries. The *People's Daily* of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) welcomed it as 'the first time' to screen films from 'fraternal countries in Beijing' (1950).[1] Whereas in 1951 and 1952 only the 'Soviet Film Exhibition' was launched nationwide, 1953 saw the opening of film weeks featuring movies

CONTACT Ran Ma maran@lit.nagoya-u.ac.jp

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from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria across 20 cities. Official statistics reveal that between 1949 and 1956, 19 exhibitions known as 'Film Weeks' (*dianyingzhou*) and featuring films from 12 countries were launched in the People's Republic of China (PRC) (*Chronicles* 2005, 31).

This study engages the historiography of Chinese film festivals by shedding light upon the film weeks of the 'Seventeen Years' (*shiqinian*), which spans from the 1949 founding of the PRC to the 1966 onset of the Cultural Revolution. It marks a crucial stage of 'political, cultural, and economic transformations' for the Chinese socialist state (Chen and Braester 2011, 9). In particular, this era is distinguished by waves of mass campaigns that profoundly shaped the regime's cultural production and consumption, as well as the experience of the Chinese people. As a specific type of state-run event, a film week showcased imported films from foreign nations, although occasional PRC line-ups were also featured. An edition of a national-level film week, lasting 7 to 10 days, usually incorporated satellite exhibitions at various Chinese cities.

In documenting and analyzing the film weeks of the Seventeen Years, this study bridges the overlapping research concerns of Chinese film studies and film festival studies. It also seeks to address the gaps and dissatisfactions perceived in both fields. Specifically, two questions constitute the core objects of analysis: (1) how the Chinese film week participates in 'articulating Chinese socialism and the PRC as a nation state' (Chen and Braester 2011, 9); and (2) how the Chinese film week relates to the Eurocentric discursive framework of film festival studies.

For Chinese film studies, monographs in both English and Chinese canvassing PRC film history have barely chronicled Chinese film festivals or the relevant circulation/exhibition practices of the Maoist period (1949–1978) (see Clark [1987]; Compilation Group [1989]; Zhang [2004]). Recently, growing interest in Maoist cinema has paved the way for a wider spectrum of studies in film distribution and exhibition (Chen 2009a, 2009b; Chen and Braester 2011). As illuminating as these explorations are, little has been written about domestic international film exhibition programs such as film weeks.

Film festival studies research suggests that film festivals were a crucial mechanism in the cold war era cultural showdown between Eastern and Western Blocs (see de Valck [2007]; Iordanova [2003, 2006]; Wong [2011]). Much attention has been paid to the sites of friction between the blocs, especially the international film festivals in Moscow, Karlovy Vary, or Berlin. Meanwhile, emergent studies on PRC film festivals highlight the state-sanctioned international film festivals at Shanghai (est. 1993) and Beijing (est. 2011) or the controversial independent film festivals that first emerged in the early 2000s and primarily showcase Chinese independent movies. The Maoist period has been scarcely mentioned in the still-developing historiographical accounts of Chinese film festivals.

The historiography of Chinese cinema has generally neglected Maoist cinema – including 'film weeks' – as argued by Chen and Braester (2011, 6). This

may be due to the intentional repression of Cultural Revolution memories or to an assumption about the cinema's propagandist agenda and suspicion about its value. This oblivion also symptomizes the dominating 'paradigms and practices of the cold war,' which preferred 'more readily visible cultural dynamics' (Chen and Braester 2011, 7). On the other hand, the temporal–spatial as well as thematic dispersion and inconsistency of China's film festival practices during the Seventeen Years make it challenging to document and examine them as integral to the genealogy of the world film festival system. According to Cindy Wong, by the 1960s, this system was configured as 'a global festival circuit' that was 'dominated by Europe and the global North' (2011, 46).

In her investigation of the international exhibition of PRC films between 1949 and 1957, Tina Chen proposes the use of the analytic lens 'filmic geographies' to approach film exhibition both 'as practice and socio-political imagination' (2009a, 150). The notion of filmic geographies integrates the study of geopolitical mapping of the national/international film exhibition network and its 'points of connections' with the analysis of discourses and imaginaries that are embedded in and generated by such circulatory dynamics (2009a, 150). It offers a critical perspective to engage the PRC's international film exchanges of the Maoist era, which incorporates both the realms of film export (i.e. exhibition of Chinese films outside of the PRC) and film import (i.e. exhibition of foreign films within the PRC). Meanwhile, film festival studies apply sociological models of circuit and system to understand the film festival institution. Specifically, Bruno Latour's theory of actor network is deployed to conceptualize a film festival as a 'complex network at the micro-level' and to discern the interconnections between the festivals (Elsaesser 2005, 103), emphasizing both human and non-human actors and their interconnections.

Engaging both the concept of filmic geographies and the Latourian framework of network, this paper examines the phenomenon of film weeks at three levels. First, it examines the pivotal actors that organized and programmed film weeks and their interconnections. Next, it provides a geopolitical mapping of China's relations with foreign countries featured in the film weeks. Finally, it approaches the interconnections between film week actors and the intranational relations as a set of discursive articulations. Although it was situated within a centralized socialist cultural system, as an exhibition mode, film weeks still constituted an interface through which actors and agendas negotiated with the dominating role of the Chinese party-state; throughout these processes, film weeks developed linkages with the film industries (Chinese and foreign) and socialist film culture. The concept of filmic geographies enables us to locate film weeks at the intersection of the PRC's cultural exchange programs and the geopolitical mapping of the cold war order. Specifically, film weeks articulated China's shifting self-positioning in relation to the socialist community and the Third World. In highlighting and evaluating the compatibilities and discrepancies between the Chinese film week practice and the Eurocentric

theoretical perspectives on international film festivals, while retaining sight of the specific sociohistorical context of the Seventeen Years, this study also intends to rethink the Chinese film festivals' discursive connection with the global film festival system.

Engaging the socialist cultural system: organization and function

In current studies in English, some scholars designate 'film weeks' without distinction as 'film festivals' (see Chen 2009b). However, in the PRC, events known as 'film festivals' did not emerge until the late 1980s during which the practice of 'film weeks' was still continuing. It is important to differentiate between the concepts and practices of film weeks (*dianyingzhou*) from film festivals (*dianyingjie*), as they reflect the different uses of the terms during the socialist era.

The PRC's film weeks were emplaced within a centralized socialist cultural system in which film was valued for its function 'of propaganda and pedagogy rather than of entertainment' (McDonald, qtd from Hong 1994, 87). CCP's conceptualization of art and culture in relation to politics and its efforts to activate and reinforce culture's ideo-pedagogical function through massive social engineering had laid the groundwork for the organization and function of the film week. Yet, similar to other cultural activities in the Maoist era, film weeks were 'not simply the product of the cultural demands of national authorities' (Clark 1987, 57). A film week was a complicated process that involved a range of supporters including the cultural authorities, film industries (film professionals), and audiences, although a hierarchy existed among its agendas. Film weeks were of economic significance for the PRC's film imports and also relied on the Chinese film industry's development for their growth. Also, Chinese audiences relied on film weeks as contact points and platforms to access foreign films. Here we will mainly look at the official bodies and participants that were in charge of film weeks and their correlations.

China film corporation

The China Film Corporation (*zhongguo dianying gongsi*), a state-owned entity established in 1951, was the top-level agency that orchestrated national film weeks.[2] Under the leadership of the PRC's Ministry of Culture and its affiliated Film Bureau, the China Film Corporation played two roles: as a film enterprise, it monopolized the PRC's film business in both exports and imports, and it took charge of its international film exchanges, including international exhibitions both at home and abroad; as a political organ, it embroiled itself within the Chinese Communist Party's general ideological and political leitmotifs, responding to the shifting cultural policies and various mass campaigns that shaped and reshaped the format and content of film weeks.

The China Film Corporation coordinated the national-level film week via its extensive network of municipal- and provincial-level branches, including branches in the ethnic minority autonomous regions. Nevertheless, as will be elaborated later, in the case of the Soviet Film Week, the Soviet's All-Union Corporation for Export and Import of Films or Sovexportfilm also played a vital role in circulating Soviet films via its network within China. In contrast to the sense of place and space manifested in the festival phenomenon since the establishment of early film festivals (e.g. Venice, est. 1932 and Cannes, est. 1946) (Wong 2011, 39–40), the PRC's film weeks did not orient themselves toward a specific location in order to emphasize the pronounced geographic and touristic features of a particular city or region. Instead, the spatial layout of the national-level film weeks revolved around the idea of reaching out nationwide to audiences for foreign films. An edition of national-level film week travelled to centrally located and culturally vibrant cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou; it also included showings in southwestern and northwestern provincial capitals, even as the timing and periods of such satellite film weeks varied slightly.[3] Apart from governmental bodies, semi-official entities such as the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and the China Film Association were also mobilized to coordinate the film weeks.[4]

Industrial connections

Film weeks were of economic significance for China Film Corporations' distribution/exhibition chain of imported films. Although the priority was not economic profit, film weeks were placed within a larger context of building a self-sustaining Chinese film industry. Under the planned economy, the China Film Corporation set quotas for its local branches regarding the projected number of film screenings and the size of the audience at the film weeks (*Shanghai* 1989, 32). Within the quota system, branch companies reported the box office figures and attendance numbers to the headquarters. Arguably, the China Film Corporation considered film weeks an effective mechanism to enhance its nationwide distribution of imported films. For instance, a 1953 'Notice' by the China Film Corporation headquarters suggested measures that its branches take to outperform the annual film distribution plan, and film weeks were just one tactic that it recommended for the local companies (*Shanghai* 1989, 26).

Film weeks also relied on the technological advancement and institutional support from the film industry in translation (i.e. subtitling and dubbing) and distribution (e.g. network development and projection technologies) to function (see Chen 2009b, 80). In 1953, the PRC initiated its first Five-Year Plan (1953–1957) and its sub-project to develop the Chinese film industry was exactly modeled after the Soviet Union's plan. Chen elucidates that by 1954, Chinese film studios already produced more films and were capable of

dubbing 'approximately 40 films per year' (2009b, 78). The founding of two dubbing studios in Changchun (1949) and Shanghai (1950) helped to broaden the scope of audiences for foreign films.[5] Clark also proposes that China's economic growth and the political climate of the mid-1950s allowed for large-scale film imports (2011, 79). However, though interrelated, the growth in imported films did not directly translate into the growth of film weeks, either in terms of frequency or the number of films featured, which I will address in the section on cultural diplomacy.

Programming and censorship

It is important to differentiate the film weeks' mechanism of programming or *paipian* (which literally means 'scheduling the films') from more recent notions of programming (and that of programmer). The contemporary idea of programming celebrates the individualized curatorial vision of professionals such as festival directors and programmers. In contrast, programming at the film weeks was centralized and collectively negotiated, and the process and criteria for selection were barely made known to the public. News about the lineup of a specific film week was often passed down from the China Film Corporation headquarters to its municipal/provincial branches as an official order.

Programming of film weeks should also be situated within the PRC's general policy framework of film exhibitions. Prior to 1956, the China Film Corporation headquarters was the only programming body to schedule film screenings nationwide. In the spring of 1956, it instituted the 'Five Guidelines for Film Programming,' which allowed its branches to arrange screenings according to: (1) content of the films, (2) time (slots) and seasonal changes, (3) local/regional characteristics, (4) international sociopolitical climates, and (5) types of audience (*Chronicles* 2005, 23). Consequently, these guidelines promised provincial/municipal branches' increased flexibility in planning film weeks. The censorship or inspecting (*shencha*) bodies also impacted film week programs. The Ministry of Culture and its affiliated Film Bureau were regarded as the top-level censors, even as instances of friction existed between them.[6] Regional or local governmental entities that were not related to cultural affairs could also censor foreign films from the China Film Corporation repertoire (see Wu 2005, 122–123).

Engaging the cold war world: cultural diplomacy and socialist cinephilia

A closer look at the international film festival scene between the 1950s and late 1960s suggests a dominant organizational pattern in which mostly European festivals invited nations to participate and national committees substantially controlled film submission and selection. Whereas, festivals became 'sites of

competitive government investment and sponsorship,' they were also enmeshed in the cold war cultural showdowns (Wong 2011, 46). Although not festivals in the contemporary sense of the term, the organizational framework of the PRC's film weeks was in line with the norm of the global film festival system of this period. Despite its non-competitive nature, the PRC framework involved international interactions between governmental entities and the Chinese authorities that programmed films from a range of countries.

How are we to best understand film weeks' framework of national cinemas, and how did the circulation of foreign films relate to the political–pedagogical agenda defined by the Chinese state? Leveraging the critical lens of cultural diplomacy, we may consider film weeks as part of the state's efforts in 'fostering exchanges in the cultural field designed to anchor the PRC firmly in the socialist camp' (Volland 2008, 52). Programs of cultural exchanges were constitutive of the overarching project launched by the party-state in reshaping the citizens' understanding of the nation's identity, namely, an identity that was built upon the awareness of the citizens not only as the subjects of the socialist regime but also as members of an emerging transnational community. Conceptualization of such a community was premised on the tenet of internationalism, which proclaimed the triumph of socialism through the mobilization of laboring classes all over the world to fight against capitalism and imperialism.

The evolving trajectories of film weeks in outlining China's fraternal ties with foreign countries also charted the PRC's self-positioning in relation to the socialist community and Third World nations. On the one hand, these trajectories indicated 'the uneven distribution of power,' wherein the Soviet Union was the 'core coordinator of the intrabloc cooperation,' and Moscow 'the center of gravitation in the socialist world' (Volland 2008, 53–54). On the other hand, by hosting non-Soviet film weeks during the Seventeen Years, the PRC maneuvered to realign its international relations and assert its leadership in the struggles of socialist internationalism.

We may better understand film weeks' mechanisms for nurturing an international consciousness by turning to the films showcased. The lineups of imported films varied by their nations of origin and presented various assemblages of genres, themes, esthetics, and technologies, all of which cannot be satisfactorily addressed in this essay alone and await more comprehensive study. Instead of a generalizing inquiry into the films for their ideological significance, we can shift the lens to China's changing framing of bilateral/multilateral relations and view the interpretative mechanism that framed the audiences' relationship with foreign films as a dynamic, contingent, and historically specific process. Engaging with such an analytical focus, we look at which strategies were deployed to promote certain interpretive frameworks, and what popular understandings were propagated. Both aspects will be further explored in the case studies of the Soviet Film Week. Given that film weeks entailed a series of rituals and

programs highlighting both movie-going and film criticism, here I will mainly examine this mechanism from the perspective of socialist cinéphilia.

Programs of cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy generally refers to the exchange of ideas, values, and diverse aspects of culture to promote mutual understanding and interests, and it reinforces soft power as a significant approach for furthering foreign diplomacy. Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Mark Donfried emphasize that during the cold war, 'cultural productions became the most powerful tools for the promotion of ideological goals and strategies' (2013, 15). Within the socialist bloc, cultural diplomacy sought to strengthen transnational camaraderie and collaboration and encompassed a wide range of programs including film exchanges. Elaborating on the cold war intrabloc cultural interactions, Marsha Siefert underlines that between the bloc countries there was a well-developed system of film exhibition and distribution in which visiting delegations and film weeks were arranged to boost the socialist collaboration (see 2012, 37).

PRC film weeks, as part of the intrabloc film exchanges, relied on careful planning to underscore the overarching agenda of friendship. While international film festivals in the post-World War II years developed a working calendar that capitalized on such factors as the cycle of film production and ideal tourist/holiday season (Wong 2011, 41–42),[7] film weeks went by a calendar that earmarked anniversaries of the establishment of diplomatic relations and other historical events such as the October Revolution. For example, the 1956 Yugoslavian Film Week was organized in part to confirm and enhance the diplomatic ties between China and Yugoslavia that were newly established in 1955. Film weeks connoted bilateralism and reciprocity, reinforcing the identity of togetherness within the bloc. To organize a film week in China suggested that a reciprocal Chinese Film Week would be correspondingly launched in the featured country; these activities were often in line with cultural cooperation agreements signed between China and its communist allies (see Volland 2008, 55).

Intriguingly, PRC's film weeks also featured cinemas from countries outside of the socialist bloc, such as India (1955), France (1956), and Egypt (1957), none of which had diplomatic ties with the PRC when the film weeks were held. Gienow-Hecht and Donfried illustrate that even in the crisis areas of the cold war, cultural diplomacy could take 'unpredictable turns that refute the vision of cultural diplomacy policy as subordinate to the foreign policy making process' such that it occasionally 'replaced or counteracted formal diplomacy in cases of relations going sour'. Both the authors have discussed the PRC's 'forceful program of cultural diplomacy,' which was not only designed to consolidate the nation's status within the socialist world but also targeted countries 'with whom China had hostile diplomatic relations or none at all' (2013, 20).

Film weeks arguably constituted a powerful mechanism for the Chinese state to reach out for and improve strategic partnerships with extra-bloc nations. For instance, although China did not establish a diplomatic relationship with Japan until 1972, a Japanese Film Week was held at three major Chinese cities in June 1956. Its lineup consisted of five titles characterized by acute awareness of the social problems in modern Japan, including works by leftist film-makers such as Imai Tadashi and Yamamoto Satsuo. Such a move testifies to the amelioration of Sino–Japan relations at the grassroots level at that historical conjuncture.

While turning to the internationalist framework of friendship and solidarity in analyzing film weeks' sociopolitical context, we should also take into account China's domestic political environment. During the period of the Hundred Flowers (1956–1957), political control was loosened to encourage the public to freely express opinion of the party-state. Clark argues that this political climate of liberalization crucially made possible the expansion in the number of imported films and the range of nations from which they came (2011, 79). Accordingly, the tenet of friendship itself became the *modus vivendi* of coping with sociopolitical uncertainties. A majority of film weeks followed the 'one-film-week-for-one-country' pattern, and most were only one-off exhibitions. Mirroring the PRC's self-positioning strategies within the cold war order, film weeks could be canceled or suspended as a means of repudiating an alliance within or outside of the socialist bloc.

Engaging socialist cinéphilia

As a project for cultural exchanges, a film week often came as a package of spectacles and rituals, offering a full repertoire of film-centered activities in addition to the screenings. A national-level film week usually incorporated opening ceremonies with state leaders, party cadres, and cultural officials delivering speeches to frame its significance, visits by a foreign film delegation, and a series of publicity events.

The programs and rituals framed the audiences' relationship with the foreign filmic texts and subjected audience members to the practices of viewing and discussion. Here we scrutinize the relationship between the audiences of the PRC's film week and the screened films by turning to the conceptualization of socialist cinéphilia. Braester posits that Maoist cinéphile practice derived its significance by emphasizing the importance of ideological framing and interpretations of film texts and contexts over the analysis of filmic images, epitomizing the tension between art and politics of the Maoist era. At the crux of Maoist cinéphilia, film criticism was premised on collective identity, and it built up a community dedicated to analyzing ideological signs (2013, 98–99). Film weeks contributed to the dynamism of socialist cinéphilia by shoring up a public platform where the viewers could engage with international films as

an ideologically undergirded 'community,' despite the fact that such a platform was far from the public sphere proposed by Habermas (see 1991).

Referring to Braester's formulation of Maoist film criticism, we may propose that even the strategies reaffirming and realizing the ideo-pedagogical agendas of film weeks can be regarded as a 'vehement form of cinéphilia' (2013, 99). As film weeks became institutionalized, the background and history of the featured national cinemas were introduced and explained extensively before and after the exhibitions. This occurred as picture exhibitions, review competitions, lectures and seminars, or through the publication of film or culture readers, brochures, and special columns or issues in newspapers and film magazines. These publications collated relevant reports, film reviews, and even letters to the editor. Despite its propagandistic connotations, this publicity cycle represents a full set of cinéphile reactions as well.

For instance, as the *Czechoslovakian Film Week* (1953) toured Shanghai, a pamphlet compiled by the China Film Corporation Shanghai branch was circulated, not only introducing its line-up (i.e. seven narrative features and one documentary feature) in terms of their sociological background and 'main theme,' but also it including a 'discussion outline' or a compilation of questions to frame the spectators' responses to each film and its theme. Questions drafted for *The Silent Barricade* (Otakar Vávra, 1949), a war film portraying Prague's citizens' heroic 1945 resistance against the Nazi army contained items such as, 'Which aspects of this film make you think that the fascist troops were doomed to fail, and the people who fought for freedom, democracy and peace were destined to win?' and, 'Which characters in this film could be considered our role models, and how we should learn from them?' (CFC Shanghai 1953, 3).

Moreover, such cinéphile rituals at film weeks were augmented by visits from foreign film delegations, even though these progressive film-makers, actors, and actresses were not introduced to the Chinese audience as glamorous celebrities, and spectators were not encouraged to identify them as 'film stars.' The label of 'film worker' substituted for that of 'star' to connote an egalitarian understanding of a spectator's engagement with the screen persona (see Lu 2008, 113–114).

The 1955 Republic of India Film Week showcased Raj Kapoor's classic *Awara* (*The Vagabond*, 1951). Set in 1950's India, this drama centers on the protagonist, 'little tramp' Raj (Raj Kapoor), and his confrontations with a tragic family history and unjust society. India sent a film delegation of 15 members to attend this film week's opening ceremony in Beijing. Delegation members included actors and actresses, film scriptwriters, and film critics. *People's Daily*, October 18, 1955 reported that the Indian guests also met Chinese audiences at five Beijing theaters, where they hugged, shook hands, sang, shouted slogans with the viewers, and spoke passionately about the value of film art in consolidating the Sino–Indian friendship. Audiences of the Indian Film Week also included ethnographer-like film festival-goers who expected new discoveries. The selectively published feedback from the viewers, who were from various

backgrounds and ethnicities, indicated that they were impressed by the exotic 'Oriental flavor' of these Indian movies and were fascinated with their 'appealing songs' and dance (Clark 2011, 79).

Film weeks offered opportunities for Chinese audiences to appreciate foreign films based on a framework within which Chinese films could be compared to foreign ones and foreign films among themselves. Although the CCP intended to influence the attendance of screenings by organizing work units, schools, and governmental entities for special viewing sessions, and to ideologically channel the interpretation and comparison of films, audiences were not totally passive. Despite the problems of relying on box office figures to learn about popular taste in Maoist era, it is intriguing to notice that in the relatively liberal period of the Hundred Flowers, the 1956 French Film Week at Shanghai (three films exhibited at twenty-two local theaters) had a high average attendance rate of 89.7% (in contrast to the same-scale local exhibitions for newly produced Chinese titles, whose attendance rate ranged from 9 to 68%). Based on such numbers, some film professionals have claimed that the audiences made their own choices to watch more interesting foreign films (*Wenhuibao* 1956). As a result, further debates were ignited about the Party's control of art, which was believed to be responsible for producing 'formulaic though ideologically sound' titles (Braester 2013, 108–109).

Soviet film week

The once-prominent phenomenon of Soviet Film Week constituted one of the most dramatic episodes of the PRC's international film exchanges during the Seventeen Years. The entangled power relations between the PRC and the USSR defined not only the content and organizational structure of this film week but also its ideological and industrial significance.

In 1950, an inaugural edition of the national exhibition of Soviet films, then titled 'Soviet Film Exhibition,' was launched.[8] The annual, nationwide event often opened on 7 November, the anniversary of the October Revolution. This practice ended only when the worsening Sino–Soviet relationship resulted in the withdrawal of Soviet specialists and facilities from China in 1960, a year wherein the last Soviet Film Week took place, consisting then only of films that had been previously purchased. Several post-1960 film exhibitions that contained Soviet titles shifted their thematic emphasis to commemorate the October Revolution or the Victory of Anti-Fascist War.[9] By 1966, formal film exchange between the two countries came to a standstill (see Chen 2009b). No Chinese film delegation would visit the Soviet Union again to scout for new Soviet movies until 1985.

The filmic geographies of the Soviet Film Week mapped out the changing trajectories of the Sino–Soviet relationship. In its early years, the PRC regarded the Soviet Union as the significant other in the challenge to legitimize its status

in an emerging socialist world. Under the PRC's guiding policy to 'lean to one side,' which had been proclaimed by Mao in 1949, the Chinese state endeavored to promote this popular understanding of the Sino–Soviet friendship through the introduction of Soviet cultural products. Meanwhile, accompanying the national campaign of 'learn from the Soviet,' the Sino–Soviet collaboration was supported by the influx of Soviet specialists and advisers who offered training, advice, and help for a wide range of Chinese industries, including film. The Soviets' central role in the Sino–Soviet cultural exchange manifested itself in the PRC's disproportionate importation of Soviet films between 1949 and 1952 (see Chen 2009b, 78–79) and in the Chinese state's commitment to routinely hosting the Soviet Film Week throughout the 1950s – which, unlike others, was held regularly in many cities nationwide.

The Soviet Film Week should be examined against the contrasting strengths of the Chinese and Soviet film industries. As previously outlined, technologies of translation as well as of distribution figured prominently in the Sino–Soviet film exchange, and the Chinese film industry's progress in both realms, propelled by the acquirement of advanced Soviet technologies, were essential to the institutionalization of Soviet Film Week (Chen 2009b). Based on the 1949 agreement on Sino–Soviet film exchanges which centered on the activities of Sovexportfilm, Soviet networks controlled film distribution and technology and supplied for China's developing distribution network (Chen 2009b, 78). During the better days of the Sino–Soviet relationship, the exhibition of Soviet films in China, including film weeks, also benefited from more flexible official policies and regulations regarding printed media advertisements, tax payment, ticket pricing, and lenient censorship procedures (see Liu 2011, 31–34).

The Sino–Soviet knowledge transfer, as mediated through Sovexportfilm, may have assisted Chinese film professionals in re-conceptualizing their design and organization of the Soviet Film Week. At the first national convention of film company managers in 1952, while brainstorming how to improve the distribution of Soviet films within China, a Sovexportfilm expert indicated that launching events such as 'film exhibitions,' 'film months,' and 'film talks' across Chinese cities would develop a wider audience for Soviet movies (*Chronicles* 2005, 12). This anecdote about the Soviet expert's advice epitomizes the Soviet Union's pedagogical role in its knowledge exchanges with China. Although various factors contributed to the post-1952 increase in the number of film weeks,[10] Soviet Film Week/Film Month may have provided successful templates for running a film week and illustrated its value in publicity for the Chinese cultural authorities, inspiring them to apply similar strategies to programming other film weeks.

The decrease in the Soviet share of the Chinese cinema market in the mid-1950s (see Chen 2009b, 79) partially affected the size of the Soviet Film Week. As a new agreement that took effect in 1954 guaranteed equal financial terms

for the PRC in its film exchange with the Soviets, China also entered a new stage where it proclaimed itself the core of socialist film exchanges (Chen 2009b, 78). Such an ambitious self-positioning was buttressed by its endeavors to enhance its film imports and exports with other socialist nations, and was evidenced with the launching of Asian Film Week in 1957.

The PRC's shifting of the Sino–Soviet relationship translated into its programming framework of the films of the Soviet Film Week. 1956 marks the year in which Nikita Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin deepened the rift between the CCP and the Soviet communist party; thereafter China progressively estranged itself from the Soviet Union. A close look at Beijing's Soviet Film Week lineup demonstrates that between 1950 and 1956, 10 out of 70 titles were features set during the October Revolution and the ensuing Russian civil war (1917–1922), 12 were set during the World War II, and 15 during the Soviet socialist construction. However, between 1957 and 1960, 19 out of 28 titles were set in the era of revolution, 4 on World War II subjects, with only 3 on the Soviet modernization. While the contrasting proportion between revolution-centered titles and those with modern themes reflects Soviet film-makers' increasing interest in exploring subjects on the Bolshevik Revolution, as well as the domestic Soviet sociopolitical environment that increasingly allowed them to do so (also see Li 2014), it probably also reflects Chinese audiences' passion for subjects of revolution and war (Zhang 2012, 158–159). Moreover, by emphasizing the communist revolution led by Lenin, and Stalin's contribution to the Marxism–Leninism, the CCP sought to propagate the significance of the revolution in order to cultivate audience member's consciousness of being part of the international communist movement. These programming choices manifested the CCP's commitment to Leninism. The CCP achieved this also by shunning films set in Soviet's socialist construction under Khrushchev's rule (1956–1964), which prepared the CCP for its debate with the Soviets over the 'correct' interpretation of the Leninist doctrine (i.e. one of the underlying issues of the Sino–Soviet polemics).

Produced during Stalin's rule, two biographical films by Mikhail Romm, *Lenin in October* (1937, co-directed with Dmitriy Vasilev) and its sequel, *Lenin in 1918* (1939), provide pertinent examples to understand the CCP's programming concerns for Soviet titles. *Lenin in October* centers on the leader's decisive role in organizing the Bolsheviks capture of the Winter Palace; *Lenin in 1918* foregrounds the Great Man's leadership during the Russian Civil War and ends with Stalin's heroic commandership of the Soviet Army after Lenin is shot. Both movies were featured in the 1950 Soviet Film Exhibition, in film exhibitions in the 1960s celebrating the anniversary of October Revolution, and even in screenings during the Cultural Revolution. As Clark reasons, for the Chinese authorities, showing these films in the Maoist era 'could express loyalty to Lenin and to Stalin […] in contrast to their current "revisionist" successors, who were attacking Chairman Mao' (2008, 151–152).

Importantly, the Sino–Soviet split in 1960 profoundly impacted the configuration of PRC's film weeks in general. The disrupted industrial connection with the Soviets caused supply shortages of films within the PRC, resulting in urgent countermeasures from the Chinese film industry. In September 1960, the Ministry of Culture issued an order to cut the supply of films and control the number of film copies circulated for distribution. As part of these countermeasures, in 1960, the PRC suspended the screening of 167 films imported from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. By 1965, the geographical scope of film weeks had changed and the number of film weeks shrunk considerably as the geopolitical emphasis shifted to the Third World.

Asian film week

The 1957 Asian Film Week (*yazhou dianyingzhou*) exemplified PRC's early experiments in choreographing an international event participated in by multiple nations. It articulated China's redefined position within Asia in the wake of the Korean War (1950–1953) and the Bandung Conference (Asia–Africa Conference, 1955). Particularly through the latter occasion, the Chinese state positioned itself at the core of the Third World anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism struggle, and nonaligned movement.

Reverberating with the Bandung spirit, the Asian Film Week asserted the PRC's active role in regional cultural exchanges with an all-encompassing lineup of 17 films from 15 Asian countries.[11] Upon its closing, a joint communiqué announced that the gathering would be continued as Asia–Africa Film Festival (*yafei dianyingjie*, AAFF), with each participating country alternating organizational duties of the mobile film event.[12] For the Chinese state, this project was intended to underscore its alliance with the decolonized and unaligned Third World. The first Asia–Africa Film Festival was launched in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 1958. A second edition was not held until 1963 in Cairo, and the third and last edition took place in 1964 in Jakarta. In 1954 a Southeast Asian Film Festival was established, and it became essential to Japan's film festival counter diplomacy, designed to consolidate the ideologically bonded 'Free Asia' bloc (Lee 2014, 228). The Asia–Africa Film Festival shared the Southeast Asian Film Festival's peripatetic system of moving the festival from country to country. The former was probably designed to compete with the later in reconfiguring regional film exchange networks, but it remained short-lived. Further study into cold war regional film festival diplomacy should also take into account the Soviet-backed Asian and African Film Festival launched in 1968, also located at Tashkent.[13]

Conclusion

By the end of the Seventeen Years, as European festivals were gearing toward an era of programmers,[14] Chinese film weeks (and, indeed, many other

state-sponsored cultural activities) were further subjected to the political leitmotifs and radicalizing cultural policy of the socialist regime. Although film weeks did not completely disappear during the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the China Film Corporation only maintained official film exchanges with Albania, North Korea, Vietnam, and Romania. The revival of film weeks was facilitated by the normalization of Chinese society with the introduction of 'Reform and Opening-up' policies in 1978, which promulgated economic reform and opening up to the outside world. In the 1980s, the launch of USA Film Week, UK Film Week, and so forth signaled China's new positioning within the global film network, which was also manifested in the frequent presence of Chinese films and film delegations at Western film festivals such as Cannes, Venice, and the Berlinale since the late 1970s.

Distinguished by their ideo-pedagogical imperatives, film weeks of the Seventeen Years derived their value from the format and symbolic value of the exchanges, rather than from content; the programming orientation was less toward engaging their spectators to discover exciting film works and auteurs and more toward offering the 'correct' interpretative framework for them, which exemplified the gist of Maoist cinéphilia. Here we need to rethink Dina Iordanova's model of 'parallel circuit,' which refers to the Soviet-centric festival circuit in the cold war era existing without much interaction or interference with the Western festival system (2013, 119). Whereas the PRC actively participated in the Soviet-centric film system, by hosting film weeks featuring movies from the non-bloc countries and by sending films and film delegations to various film festivals overseas, it also established points of connection with other parallel circuits in the 'free world,' even though these moves were motivated by short-term diplomatic agendas and often disrupted by the domestic political climate. Film weeks constituted a series of experiments wherein the Chinese state, film industry, and audiences engaged multiple film circuits at a local scale. The significance of local practices hinges on their deviation from, rather than convergence with, either the Soviet or the European models of the similar period: it is through working with the differences that Chinese film weeks developed their engagements with various assemblages of power, technologies, and knowledge.

As an ending note, I want to emphasize how the survey of the film weeks of the Seventeen Years relates to our understanding of Chinese film festivals established in the neoliberal context with the intensification of marketization since the early 1990s and continuing to this day. Although state-sanctioned international film festivals located in Shanghai and Beijing are still organized to highlight their scale and symbolic value as 'festivals' unsurprisingly, they also compete to fit into the world festival system via the accreditation by international bodies such as FIAPF[15] and the establishment of Chinese-language cinema-centered film markets. Meanwhile, however limited their dependence on the Chinese cultural system, independently programmed, grassroots-level

film festivals flexibly leverage their constrained capital, resources and publicness to espouse film art, auteurs, and the value of programming apropos of Chinese independent cinema to become associated with the international festival circuit. If a genealogy of Chinese film festivals begins with the film weeks' incoherent engagements with the cold war film system, both the state-sanctioned and independent festivals have renewed those vernacular efforts in connecting Chinese cinema with a layered, hierarchical international film network. By locating the inquiry into these contemporary festivals at the intersections of specific sociopolitical as well as economic contexts and assemblages of stakeholders, we could contest the facile differentiation between 'state-run' and 'unofficial' festivals and further question the differences between Chinese festival practices and their global models.

Notes

1. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. I would like to thank Chris Berry, Luke Robinson and all the other colleagues of the Chinese Film Festival Studies Research Network for their visions and discussions, which inspired this research project.
2. In 1951, CFC was known as 'China Film Management Corporation,' In 1958, the title was changed to 'China Film Distribution and Exhibition Corporation,' which clarified its roles in both film distribution and exhibition.
3. However, national-level film weeks were mostly confined within urban areas. Both Chen and Clark have pointed out the differentiation between audiences for subtitled films – as 'literate' and 'more educated' – and those for dubbed versions (Chen 2009b, 81; Clark 2011, 7–8).
4. The establishment of CPAFFC was based on 10 non-governmental friendship associations, each of which specifically attended to the 'one-to-one' connection between PRC and one partnership country. Refer to CPAFFC (December 8 2014). http://en.cpaffc.org.cn/introduction.
5. See note 4.
6. The Film Bureau's early and foundational censorship regulation from December 1949 designated general criteria targeting films that were anti-communism, anti-Soviet, and anti-people; those promoting imperial and feudal values; and those considered obscene and erotic as against PRC laws and regulations.
7. Here we also need to consider the role of International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF, est. 1933). Cindy Wong points out that together with the International Federation of Film Societies (IFFS, est. 1947), both organizations 'have formed part of a loose-knit network of coordination and legitimization of festivals' (2011, 41). FIAPF has maintained a system of accrediting global film festivals.
8. Nevertheless, the number of cities that participated in the exhibition was yet to be confirmed. See *Shanghai* 1989, 14.
9. An official interpretation of a 1961 Sino–Soviet cultural agreement stipulated that exhibition of Soviet cinema could only be launched as a 'premiere' (*shouyingshi*) from then on, which essentially discouraged the practice of a national film week. See *Shanghai* 1989, 50.

10. For instance Tina Chen explains that PRC imported more foreign films from other socialist countries as its dubbing technology improved around the mid-1950s (2009b, 84).
11. With each participating country sending one recently produced movie for exhibition, Asian Film Week circulated a lineup of both fiction features and documentaries at 10 major cities. In addition to the screenings, it also welcomed 15 national film delegations to Beijing. Refer to *People's Daily*, September 8, 1957. A 1957 documentary short titled 'Asian Film Week' (dir. Gao Zhongming) recorded the delegates' activities at Beijing.
12. This communiqué is the first existing evidence of the Chinese government's willingness to host a 'film festival' (*dianyingjie*) despite the fact that the Asian-African Film Festival never took place in China.
13. The Moscow International Film Festival (est. 1959) and the Tashkent festival took place in alternating years. According to Elena Razlogova, the 1968 Tashkent festival could be situated within Soviet Union's ambition to compete 'with the "first world" Western powers for the attention of the decolonizing and unaligned "third world" countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America' (2014, 164), particularly in terms of the emerging cultural and film festivals in the post-Stalin USSR.
14. Thomas Elsaesser points out that for European festival circuit, the system in which national committees took charge of film selection changed in 1972 at the Cannes Film Festival, when it was decided that the festival directors 'had the ultimate responsibility for selecting the official entries' (2005, 90).
15. See note 8.

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